

PROBLEM: There is insufficient quantity and quality of wetland habitat to support wetland-dependent wildlife.

GOAL: Provide sufficient quantity and quality of wetland habitat to support wetland-dependent wildlife.

OBJECTIVES

Objective 1 - Protect existing wetlands in the San Joaquin Basin.

Objective 2 - Improve quality and quantity of wetlands in the San Joaquin Basin.

Objective 3 - Promote development and implementation of institutional general plans that protect wetlands.

Objective 4 - Provide public education on the value of wetlands.

Objective 1 - Protect existing wetlands in the San Joaquin Basin.

Action 1 - Acquire through fee-title and perpetual easements all unprotected wetlands as proposed by the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture component of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

A request will be made to formally adopt the goal of the Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture to protect, maintain, and restore habitat to increase waterfowl populations to levels identified in the San Joaquin Valley consistent with the other objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The plan has a goal for protection of 52,500 acres of the 67,000 acres of unprotected wetlands in the San Joaquin Basin. Approximately 15,000 acres are proposed for fee-title acquisition and 37,500 acres in easements. Included in the request will be the assignment of a San Joaquin Management Program representative to participate in or monitor progress of the CVHJV Implementation Board with scheduled reports to the Advisory Council/Action Team.

Action 2 - Provide incentive payments to landowners who manage portions of their lands for wildlife, or are unable to get into existing programs, or modify their cropping schedules to provide wintering and nesting habitat for wildlife.

A request will be made to compile a list of existing programs that provide these types of payments to landowners. It will also be necessary to establish the level of funding needed to motivate participation in these types of programs and other institutional constraints.

Objective 2 - Improve quality and quantity of wetlands in the San Joaquin Basin.

Action 3 - Develop a cooperative agreement for Central California Irrigation District to maintain Mendota Pool water levels through December 15.

A request will be made to fund development of short-term solutions to provide water to the Mendota WMA while a long-term agreement is being developed. of constructing a new Mendota Dam.

Action 4 - Provide water supplies to State, Federal and private wetlands in the San Joaquin Basin.

Requests will be made for: (1) Adoption of the San Joaquin Valley Drainage Program recommendation and the CVHJV objective to secure an affordable firm water supply that is of suitable quality and is delivered in a timely manner for use by the National Wildlife Refuges, State Wildlife Management Areas, and Grassland Resource Conservation District in the San Joaquin Basin. This is closely tied to the Bureau of Reclamation's Refuge Water Supply Investigation, (2) completion of the Refuge Water Supply Investigation (including conjunctive use and offstream storage on wetlands) by the Bureau of Reclamation.

Action 5 - Set enforceable standards for point and non-point discharges for impounded and flowing waters of the San Joaquin Basin subject to wetland uses.

A request will be made to (1) review past studies conducted on urban run-off and agricultural drainwater and any water quality standards set for wetland habitats in the San Joaquin Basin, and (2) develop enforceable water quality standards for waters subject to wetland use, and (3) identify strategies for management of urban runoff and agricultural drainwaters to protect potential wetland water supplies.

Action 6 - Provide physical and/or operational modifications to existing flood bypasses to allow floodwaters to be delivered to wetlands.

A request will be made to evaluate opportunities to modify existing flood bypasses to deliver floodwaters to wetlands.

Action 7 - Assist Grassland Water District in seeking an appropriative Water Right for 50,000 acre-feet of floodwaters from Mendota Pool.

A request will be made to offer assistance to Grassland Water District in seeking an appropriative water right for 50,000 acre-feet of floodwaters from Mendota Pool.

Action 8 - Develop and implement a coordinated delivery/drainage program for the wetlands of the West Grasslands.

A request will be made to assign a San Joaquin River Management Program representative to participate/monitor progress of the San Joaquin Basin Action Plan. This representative would help coordinate SJRMP plans with the delivery/drainage plan for Federal, State, and private wetlands in the West Grasslands (lands west of the San Joaquin River).

Action 9 - Implement a migratory bird disease management program in the San Joaquin Basin.

Action 10- Fund development of on-farm siltation basins prior to release into the San Joaquin River.

A request will be made to provide funds for creation of on-farm siltation basins through existing programs of the Soil Conservation Service.

Action 11 - Support and provide funding for habitat development at the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge.

A request will be made to the refuge manager to provide a list of opportunities where the SJRMP can assist in habitat development projects. These will be presented to the Advisory Council for possible funding.

Action 12 - Develop a means to obtain reduced power rates for pumping to maintain wetlands.

A request will be made to adopt the CVHJV objective to secure Central Valley Project power for the National Wildlife Refuges, State Wildlife Management Areas, and Grassland Resource Conservation District, and other public and private lands dedicated to wetland management.

Action 13 - Develop a revegetation/restoration program for overgrazed areas along the San Joaquin River and tributaries.

A request will be made to identify overgrazed areas along the San Joaquin River and tributaries and develop a revegetation program and grazing management program for these areas. Landowners should be canvassed for a voluntary demonstration project site.

Action 14 - Construct a water delivery system from Merced Irrigation District to Merced National Wildlife Refuge.

(Applicable depending on outcome of Federal Energy Regulatory Commission ruling)

Action 15 - Provide funds for habitat development at the Sunrise Ranch NWR and secure additional water supplies.

A request will be made to: (1) identify existing firm water supplies and identify other potential water sources, (2) investigate opportunities for a direct delivery system from Merced Irrigation District and possible diversion and/or storage of floodwaters on these lands.

Action 16 - Obtain easements on lands (primarily agricultural) with potential for restoration to wetlands and initiate restoration.

Action 17 - Implement all phases (acquisition, staffing, development, wetland creation, salinity problems, etc.) of the San Joaquin Basin Action Plan/Kesterson Mitigation Plan. Support efforts (legislative) to provide firm water supplies for the Plan's wetlands.

Objective 3 - Promote development and implementation of institutional general plans that protect wetlands.

Action 18 - Implement the specific components of the recommended plan of the San Joaquin River Drainage Program on drainage problems which benefit fish, wildlife, and their habitats (includes correction of salinity problem in San Joaquin River).

Action 19 - Mandate Counties to adopt General Plans that provide protection for wetlands.

(This is a component of legislation proposed in the riparian habitat protection solutions)

Action 20 - Support studies of urban impacts to wetlands to support protection and eventual restoration of some wetlands.

A request will be made to (1) support studies to identify impacts associated with urban encroachment on wetlands with the eventual goal of some wetland protection and restoration, and (2) provide information gained from these studies to develop and implement wetland protection measures.

Objective 4 - Provide public education on the value of wetlands.

Action 21 - Develop a public education program on the value of wetlands.

This item would be included in the education program developed for riparian lands. Again, the idea is for this to be portable display that could be used in schools, County fairs, etc.

A request will also be made to provide assistance to Grassland Resource Conservation District in developing a wetland education center. The concept is to construct an overnight camp facility for students, teachers, and special interest groups.

Action 22 - Install wood duck nesting boxes on waterways in the San Joaquin Basin.

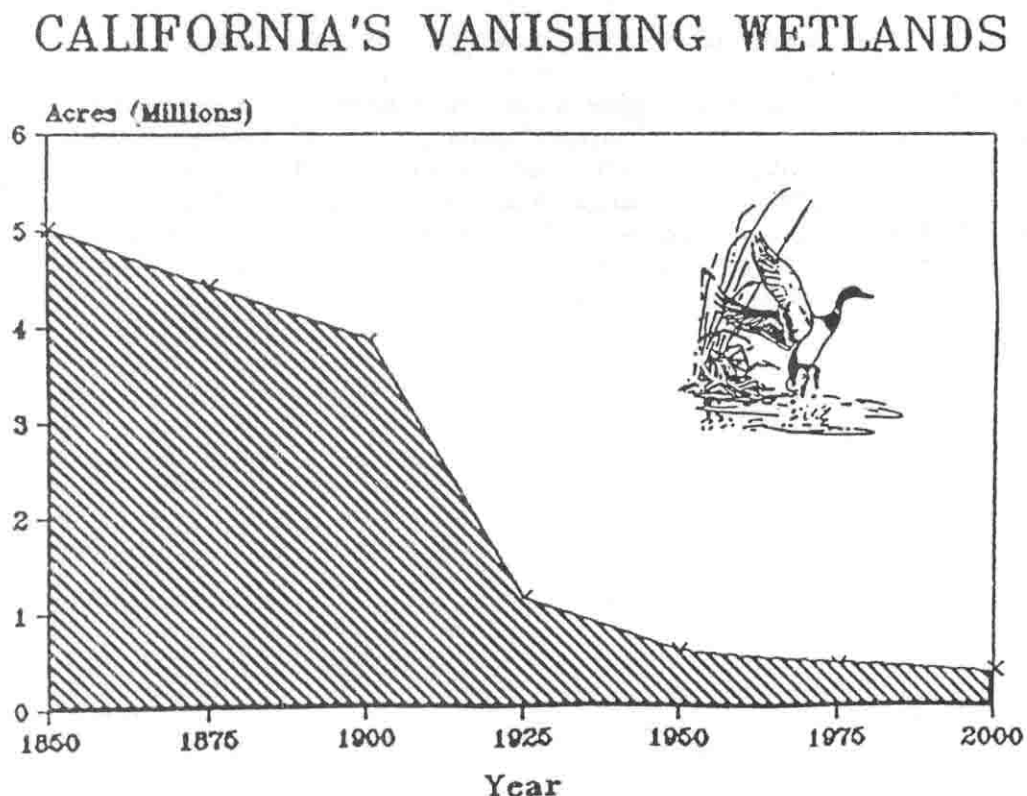
A request will be made to develop a program to install wood duck nesting boxes along the San Joaquin River and tributaries. This is an excellent opportunity for the SJRMP to get public exposure and provide opportunities for public involvement. Ducks Unlimited has an on-going program and may want to assist or provide guidance. This could be combined with the Fisheries Subcommittee classroom salmon project in an education program for schools. Identification of limiting factors associated with a comprehensive wood duck nesting box program, include a cost/benefit analysis is also needed.

PROBLEM BACKGROUND

There is insufficient quantity and quality of wetland habitat to support wetland-dependent wildlife.

The Central Valley of California including the San Joaquin Basin is the most important wintering area for waterfowl in the Pacific Flyway, currently supporting 60 percent of the total population. Historically the Central Valley contained more than 4 million acres of wetlands¹ which supported untold millions of waterfowl and shorebirds as well as other wildlife. As of 1989, only 281,000 acres of wetlands remained, a loss of more than 90 percent. Reclamation and flood control activities were largely responsible for the gradual elimination of the original meandering sloughs, oxbows, lakes and permanent and seasonal wetlands. Of these remaining wetlands, approximately 80,000 flooded acres exist in the San Joaquin Basin in an average year. Most are managed but not all of these are assured protection. Although efforts to reduce and/or eliminate wetland losses are being taken, the present trend is for the continued decline of wetlands.

Figure 1. California's Vanishing Wetlands



¹ Does not include riparian wetlands.

Major threats (unranked in priority) to the remaining non-riparian wetlands in the Basin include the following:

Drainage and conversion to agriculture. - The economic pressure to convert privately owned wetlands to croplands remains strong, despite a depressed agricultural economy for certain grain crops in recent years.

Drainage and conversion to residential or industrial use. Population growth from the San Francisco Bay and other areas is creating pressures on all undeveloped lands for urban expansion. Without adequate regulatory measures, land conversion is anticipated to continue.

Water quality. Much of the water available to publically owned and private wetlands is agricultural drainwater that is often of poor quality because of contamination by pesticides or concentrations of toxic substances. When water quality becomes a serious threat to waterfowl, it can result in the abandonment or conversion of wetland habitat or toxic exposure to the wildlife using it.

Water quantity. Many private and public wetland areas do not have adequate contracts or rights for water to maintain or manage their wetlands. The problem can be water cost, quantity, reliability, or timing. These problems have all caused abandonment or conversion of wetlands.

Operational costs. As the cost of water and electrical power increase, many private clubs and public management areas cannot afford to continue operating lift pumps and pumping groundwater. Consequently valuable wintering habitat is lost.

Water availability. Some wetlands within the Basin have existing water supplies which they currently cannot use, or only partially use, due to lack of conveyance facilities or long-term operation agreements with neighboring lands or water districts.

Management of wetlands. Some wetlands are not currently being managed to their full potential. Problems such as overgrazing and siltation are limiting wetland habitat values.

Water project and flood control operations. Existing operations and proposed changes or expansion of flood control projects have severely reduced historic wetlands and threaten remnant wetlands in the basin. Diversion of flow dessicates natural wetlands and makes the areas highly susceptible to conversion to other uses.

These threats were prioritized by river reach in the study area. The river reaches used were identical to those outlined in the San Joaquin River Management Program binder. Information on prioritization of the threats by river reach can be obtained from the subcommittee chairpersons.